

Indiana House of Representatives

News and Information

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STATEHOUSE REPORT FROM REP. DENNIE OXLEY

INDIANAPOLIS – Less than three weeks remain in the 2006 session of the Indiana General Assembly, and the jury remains out on whether there will be a resolution on the major issues before this year's Legislature.

This week, Indiana House members wrapped up committee work on bills sent to our chamber from the state Senate. In another week, we will have completed all House work on Senate bills and moved on to the final phase of the legislative process: conference committees designed to settle differences on key measures.

While other issues have generated some attention through this session, I believe the public will grade our work this year on how we handle two matters: property tax relief for Hoosiers and the governor's plan to sell our Indiana Toll Road to foreign interests.

Senators dealt with both subjects this week.

A House plan to cut property taxes that contained no way to pay for those reductions (House Bill 1001) was changed in a Senate committee. The Senate's proposal offers some relief for homeowners through an increase in the homestead deduction. It also gives local units of government the ability to raise local option income taxes to provide property tax relief.

As for the governor's plan to sell off the Indiana Toll Road, senators removed some provisions to House Bill 1008 that were first placed in the bill to gain enough support from the House majority to pass the legislation. However, the Senate still has not addressed the major concerns that have been expressed by so many people across Indiana: selling off a major public asset to a foreign investor for a period of time that could last nearly a century.

It has been interesting to watch a similar debate take place at the national level, as members of Congress on both sides of the aisle grow increasingly outraged at plans to have shipping operations at several seaports controlled by a foreign government that has had past ties to terrorism. Much like the situation in Indiana, these national agreements were negotiated in private, with lawmakers given little chance to examine them in public.

I am hopeful that these events will cause our colleagues in the Senate to take a few steps back and allow more time to look at the governor's plans. At the very least, I hope it will give them the opportunity to look at alternatives to fund infrastructure improvements, like the House Democrat plan to sell bonds that would enable the state to finance 20 years of road projects and maintain control of the toll road. While we might pay interest on bonds, I fear we will pay more money to the foreign investor over the length of the toll road contract.

In the House, most public attention focused on a proposal to limit the amount of access students have to junk food at their schools. Senate Bill 111, approved by the House Education Committee and sent along to the full House for consideration, marks the latest step in an ongoing effort by legislators, health advocacy groups and educators to offer students healthier eating choices and help reduce childhood obesity.

SB 111 would require that, by September 2007, 50 percent of all items sold in school vending machines must be healthful snacks and drinks, such as water, yogurt, baked chips, low-fat milk or juice and reduced-fat goods. More than half the states in the country have similar measures in place.

Senate Bill 324 gives local school corporations the ability to opt out of hundreds of different state regulations

covering instruction and operation. While I support the efforts to provide local control over education, it worries me that this could lead to the loss of funding aimed at early childhood intervention, summer school, vocational education or adult education, as well as instruction in such areas as alcohol and substance abuse prevention education.

Senate Bill 370 continues this administration's efforts at privatizing state operations. This measure would strive to place many job training programs under private control. Concerns have been raised on both sides of the aisle that this initiative could undercut funding for many highly-praised adult education courses across Indiana.

If you need to contact me while the Legislature is in session, please call the toll-free Statehouse telephone number of 1-800-382-9842, e-mail me through my Internet web site at www.IN.gov/H73 or write to me in care of the Indiana House of Representatives, 200 W. Washington St., Indianapolis, IN 46204.

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